

front Page

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1983: 8th SE Conference...

Report by Ollie Lee Taylor, Jim Baxter and Ron Lambe

"I am very uncomfortable with people who find the opposite sex unattractive," Rita Mae Brown told an intrigued audience of lesbians and gay men. "Most of my friends have experienced in some loving way both sexes. Whenever I meet someone who says 'I'm just straight' or 'I'm just gay,' I'm always a little nervous. It doesn't mean that you always have to go out and actualize these feelings. . . but if a good man came into my life and could really love me and I turned him down just because he was male, I would consider myself a great fool. Because love, deep love — and I'm not talking about this romantic silliness, which is an insanity shared by two — real love is so rare, you must not question the package in which it comes."

The occasion for Brown's speech was the 1983 Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men, which convened two years ago in Atlanta, from April 28-May 1. The purpose of the conference — as in previous years — was to provide a forum for lesbians and gay men to gather information, broaden organizing skills, and to strengthen a tenuous regional network. This was the eighth consecutive renewal of the conference, which first began in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Novelist Rita Mae Brown was a featured speaker, as was NGTF's Executive Director Virginia Apuzzo, Tales of the City author Armistead Maupin, and Dr. James Curran of the Center for Disease Control. Over 300 women and gay men gathered to hear these four and to attend their choice of some three dozen workshops and seminars.

The remarks by Rita Mae Brown, quoted above, indicate the tone set by much of the conference: to break down barriers — sexual, racial and economic — within the loosely formed gay community.

Keynote speaker Virginia Apuzzo urged her audience "to look at our struggle in a comprehensive fashion." Calling upon gay people to accept the diversity of their community, put aside differences, build coalitions and use the power of the voting booth, Apuzzo noted that a broad political scope is needed. "Build positively on issues that concern more people than just ourselves," she said.

At a Saturday night concert, Brown reiterated the point: "There is a paradox of oppression: as long as you keep protesting your place, your enemies have you where they want you. So long as gay people keep talking only about being gay, we're not as politically fearsome as we would be if we also developed a

platform about nuclear power, the economy, etc."

"Think about developing a broader base," she said in closing her remarks, "so that we won't be discounted or simply thrown a few crumbs from the government table."

Facing Hard Facts

The first evening was set aside for conference participants to get acquainted. Hospitality suites and caucuses were set up in the midtown area of Atlanta for early arrivals.

The first daytime sessions on Friday were dedicated to health concerns. A Symposium on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) started things off. An overview of the problem, including current research and preventative information, was presented by James Curran, M.D., M.P.H.; Lewis Katoff, Ph.D.; and James Braude, M.D. — all members of AIDS-Atlanta.

Curran, who works for the Atlanta-based U.S. Center for Disease Control, told delegates that AIDS is unique in its "severity — the profound relentlessness — of its

breakdown of the body's defenses." While stating that there is no cure nor a specific test for diagnosis of AIDS, Curran cautioned "it is important not to be negative about it. This is one area where experimental treatment may be useful. Many people who are now under treatment may live."

Later in the day, a reception for AIDS patients and acquaintances was held. The afternoon was dedicated to a symposium on substance abuse and other sexually transmitted diseases. Linda C. Regnier, R.N. and David MacDonald headed a panel discussion on alcoholism and drug abuse in the gay community. Literature on prevention and available resources were in copious supply.

Miss Brown To You

In the evening on Friday, Rita Mae Brown spoke at a Benefit for Atlanta's Human Rights Foundation. (Her appearance was not included in the conference registration fee, and while almost everyone of the conference participants paid the extra \$5 to attend, many of those attending came only for her speech and skipped the conference.)

Author of the novels *Rubyfruit Jungle*, *Six of One*, *Southern Discomfort* and, most recently, *Sudden Death*, Brown lectured on the role of language as a cultural force and as a tool of oppression.

Brown mentioned her latest novel only briefly. "Language involves two actions: speaking and listening. The two are not necessarily related," she said, adding "if any of you has an elderly mother, you know that. I will not discuss my mother this evening. She's angry with me. She's not in *Sudden Death*, and I've put her into every book I've written.

The Southeastern Conference: Past & Present

She's furious that she's not in this book, and I said 'Mother, you're 78 years old. You're too old to be a tennis player!' She said, 'Well, goddamn it, you could have made me a promoter!'

"Are you laughing?" Brown continued. "Do you know what her revenge was? She sent a naked picture of me as an infant to *Publisher's Weekly*, and they printed it. No flies on my Mom!"

Returning to her speech, she offered some provocative ideas. "We live in a culture and inside of a language. You are in an intellectual framework you didn't create, that you inherited, and it is determining the way you act and feel even as you sit here listening to me. I want you to think about that..."

The simple act of naming something, she said, is fraught with significance. For example: "There is a study by the government, about the effects of radiation on living creatures, called 'Operation Sunshine.' That's a corruption of language. The effect of radiation on the body is disgusting."

Brown also warned: "Beware the passive voice. The passive voice occurs when, instead of saying John was hit by Mary, you simply say John was hit by a moving object. The agent of change has been deleted — so you can't hold anybody responsible!"

"Remember the Pentagon Papers?" she asked. "I want to read you one sentence, describing an incident in the Vietnam War: 'Air attacks were authorized and executed by target systems for the first time in 1967.'"

"Think about it. Authorized by whom? Executed by whom? They don't really want you to know who's pushing the button, and if you don't know, you can't go after them."

Not all the responsibility for the corruption of language belongs to the government, though. "Another example is also something that happened in the sixties," she said, "in the early days of the protest movements. People would say they were going to do magnificent things. We could have simply said 'We'll get ten people down to the polls.' Instead, we said 'We'll organize the whole city!' And, of course, we couldn't do it."

"First of all, we were too young. Second, we were too inexperienced. So, of course, very often nothing happened!"

"We couldn't believe ourselves anymore. It was not just the times — which, granted, were very difficult — part of it was our own clumsiness with the human language, with English in particular."

"If you can't believe that words are going to be followed by action, why should you make common political cause with anybody? It results in paralysis."

Perhaps the most telling example of the corruption of language among ourselves, she said, is that provided by gay people who don't come out. "They're not giving covert negative information, but you're not getting the truth. Therefore, how can you believe anything this individual says to you? When you're in that kind of situation, how can you ever trust yourself to that person? Why should you entrust your cause to them? What happens when, to be quite blunt, the shit hits the fan?"

"My point is simply that there is a tremendous gap between what somebody is not saying and reality, and that can create a lot of difficulty. The case of the closet fairy is really infinitely more difficult to those of us who are out than anybody who is not gay can imagine."

"Let me put it to you another way: you are as sick as you are secret."

After her speech, Brown fielded questions from the audience. As for drugs and alcohol, she said "They will destroy you. I don't smoke, drink or use drugs. I invite you to join me."

Brown lauded the motion picture "Gandhi," then in general release, as "Marvelous. It ought to be requiring viewing for gays as a moral imperative."

She noted that the political right is potent because they look backward to hold on to values, they're on the offensive, they offer clear programs and exploit the fear of losing societal control. When asked, she responded that third party approaches do not work. She saw no alternative to a "bloc vote." "We are all going to have to compromise with one another. It still may be the lesser of two evils... or the evil of two lessers."

On the national political scene, Brown felt strongly that Andrew Young (former UN ambassador, US Representative and Mayor of Atlanta) would be "creative, dynamic, tough" and wouldn't knuckle under to what he thought was wrong. "He should be President of the United States."

While criticizing gay men for being insensitive to rape and related issues, Brown was critical of caterwauling over the differences between gay men and women. "These differences can be negotiated."

Brown ended her speech by asking audience members to "think about yourselves. Part of being gay is that you are feeling these things and culture tells you that you're wrong and that you don't exist." A move for creative change can come from lesbians and gay men, she asserted. "Trust yourself, tell the truth even though it is painful. Think about yourself in new ways and truly trust yourself."

Live Radio

During Brown's speech, Armistead Maupin (due to speak at the conference the following day) was across town at a local all-news radio station as the guest on a call-in talk show. When an irate caller informed Maupin that homosexuality was against the law in Georgia, he exclaimed "Oh, no! You mean I broke the law three times last night?"

The caller sputtered and continued, saying that gay people shouldn't act on their feelings until the laws were changed. Maupin responded. "If you think I'm going to wait for an act of legislature before I get laid you're crazy."

After the radio show, and toting his infamous saddle shoes under his arm, he caught the last of Rita Mae's speech and — once she had finished signing copies of her new book — chatted with her, briefly.

Apuzzo Speaks

Virginia Apuzzo, executive director of the National Gay Task Force and the Fund for Human Dignity, was making her third trip to Atlanta in a year and was warmly received.

Serving as the keynote speaker for the conference, she spoke for about 30 minutes to an attentive Saturday morning audience.

In her keynote speech, Apuzzo suggested ways in which local groups could organize themselves to work more effectively within both the straight power structures and with other progressive groups to address gay/lesbian concerns.

She also noted the importance of building media awareness on gay-related concerns. It is vital, she said, that stereotypes and inaccuracies be pointed out — even better, avoided.

Apuzzo highlighted the defeat of Albert Lee Smith, the Birmingham, Alabama congressional delegate who sponsored the Family Protection Act. She also mentioned efforts by gay activists in Kansas City, Missouri, which contributed to the election of a black mayor in that city.

She also pointed out that the District of Columbia Sexual Assault reform was targeted by Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority as a "litmus test." Of the 126 who voted to support the reform, only one lost — and redistricting was a factor in that instance. Twenty-four who voted in accord with Falwell lost.

Apuzzo was critical of the response to the AIDS outbreak. She termed it as "evil in that it is symptomatic of a society that has a structure of power that can eliminate so many of us." She stated that "there are categories of persons that can be ignored even if it is a matter of life or death. Can we tolerate this?"

The National Institute of Health, she said, is a billion dollar institution. "A billion is a thousand dollars every day for three thousand years. This year [1983] it has designated one fifth of one percent of its money to the AIDS crisis. That's approximately three million dollars. In New York, we spent five million to clean up our blizzard! That is not a lot of money."

"There is a necessity to make our system responsive," she said. "You can bring something noble of purpose to the struggle against oppression." (See related story.)

Fairie Anniversary

There was also a special anniversary at the conference, celebrating five years of the "Fairie Movement" in the southeast. This movement encompasses a broad spectrum of individual gay males and ideas. It is spiritual and political, anti-sexist and concerned with creating an alternative culture for gay men.

The caucus dates itself to the earlier SE conference in Atlanta in 1978. "I was not there," caucus member Ron Lambe explained, "but I understand that there was a rift between the men and the women. The women boycotted the conference, or walked out at some point."

"So, some of the men decided that it was time for them to get their act together and have a men's caucus. Mikel Wilson had this farm in the mountains of North Carolina and invited the group to come up there for a summer solstice celebration. Thus, the Running Water Gatherings were born."

"When I moved back to North Carolina in May of 1979, I heard about the Gatherings and came to the Summer '79 Gathering (the Third) and so fell in love with Running Water."

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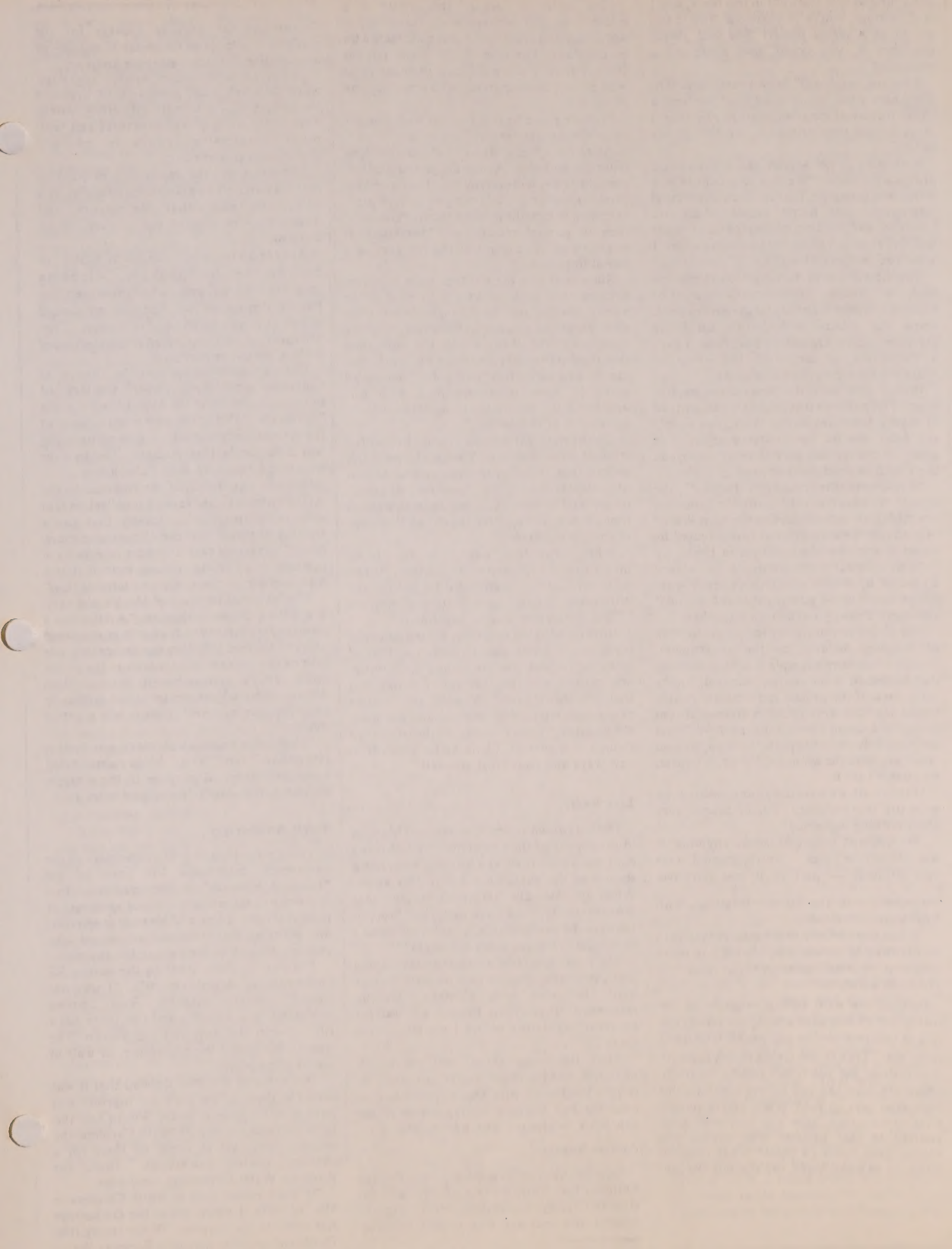
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Farm and the group of loving sensitive men, that I bought into the place and have been living here ever since." Lambie also edits *RFD*, the magazine for rural gays, from there.

"To explain what 'fairie' means would take pages, and then we would be pretty much back where we started. Part of being a fairie is defying limitations and definitions. Like all spiritual experiences, this is an experimental process and defies words. But we use words, too.

"At the '83 Atlanta conference, we formed our traditional circle and each in turn expressed what he was feeling. We did some singing, lots of hugging, and then we played. When there is this kind of circle of sensitive men (or women or whoever), the circle tends to take on a vitality of its own and it evokes whatever is needed most — laughter, play, sadness, pain, love, caring, nurturing. It was good for me to be back with my brothers arm in arm again after a long winter!"

Concert Crisis

Saturday night was to be a major event: an evening of music, dance, and entertainment was planned for the hotel ballroom. Popular Atlanta performer Pici emceed and soloed in her mime act. The Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus did a set of tunes featuring: "Let Me Entertain You," "Charlottetown," "If I Ruled the World," "Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair" and a medley from "South Pacific." Beth York provided a segment of music on the piano, followed by rock from a woman's band called Tsunami.

Unfortunately, in the midst of Tsunami's set, a pipe burst in a neighboring pump room, spreading chlorine gas into the ballroom. The leak was apparently accidental, but nevertheless the ballroom had to be quickly evacuated. Most attendees were outside and regrouped in the parking lot before they knew what had happened. Allida Black, executive director for the Atlanta Gay Center, was on medication for chlorine exposure, but no other injuries were reported.

Armistead Maupin and Rita Mae Brown gave an impromptu comedy performance in the hotel parking lot (See related story). The Fairie Caucus formed a singing circle to pass the time until a decision could be made. However, the audience thinned out after it was determined the leak could not be quickly corrected. The Atlanta Feminist Women's Chorus cancelled their performance, but a group of gay male cloggers would not give up so easily.

Later the same evening, the Buffalo Chips, took over the hotel's lounge bar, called "The Filibuster" — the conference was within shouting distance of Georgia's state capitol building — and Conference goers footstomped and cheered amid other hotel guests who looked slightly bewildered.

Sunday Morning

On Sunday morning, there was a special religious celebration provided by Evangelical Outreach Ministries of Atlanta. Southern Baptist pastor Mel Williams spoke. "The issue for this current generation is hope," he said. "Cheery optimism feels too much like dishonest fluff. But hope is not optimism. Hope is what you have when the last shred of optimism is thrown to the wind..."

"The word of the Lord does not happen to folks in power, but to the powerless. John...a nobody, rough, abrasive...a free spirit. This is the kind of strange person God comes after. God makes John into a messenger...What happens when regular folks hear the word of the Lord and take their ministry seriously? The social and political order starts to shake..."

"So the word to us is this: exercise your calling. Be a voice in the wilderness. We don't need light weight optimism now. We need hope and hope-filled messengers."

The final event was a picnic in Atlanta's Piedmont Park. The remaining delegates shared an indoor lunch beneath a windblown set of lavender balloons. There were impromptu discussions of the conference and what was learned. The picnic weather was ideal. In fact, the weather was splendid the entire weekend.

The few remaining conference goers exchanged addresses, shared feelings and sought involvement in future local activities as the time came for departures.

Down To Business

Later the same morning, attention turned to business matters. Only about 40 conference

participants attended the plenary session, the purpose of which was to evaluate the conference and to decide on the 1984 SEC location.

Birmingham filed to host the next conference. Chapel Hill preferred to hold off and host the tenth anniversary in 1985. Birmingham won without dissent.

There were some sparks over an Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance resolution directing future conference organizers to assure space and time for workshops focussed upon women's and minorities' needs. There was some opposition manifest by some who thought separatism was detrimental to the gay community. After it was explained that this wasn't in such a spirit, the motion passed with about a half-dozen dissents.

An effort was made to network gay organizations as a basis for improved communications. A number of groups felt organization and notification was poor in some instances. One contact person per state was to be appointed as the core of the new network of Southeastern Gay Organizations.

One question was tendered by a BWMT member. It concerned the lack of minority participants. (There were ten observed) This was deemed unusual for a majority black city with blacks having as much political power as Atlanta's. The conference spokesperson presiding noted efforts were made to tap into the local black community but got little response. Another delegate pointed out that 60% of the registrants were from outside the Atlanta area. This suggests that the local community was not communicated with as much as it might have been or that it was as supportive as it could have been. (Some noted that several had remarked to them in gay oriented businesses in Atlanta that they were unaware of a conference even existing in any form.)

Pros & Cons

While many commented at the plenary session, evaluation of the Atlanta conference went on long after. Several factors went into the creation of a deficit of nearly \$2,500.

Attendance at the conference was lower than expected, only one-fifth the anticipated number. "Atlantans were outnumbered by out-of-state visitors," said promoter Susan Martin. "We are very disappointed by the low local turnout." Regional attendance was termed outstanding — "there was great diversity," said a visitor from Washington, D.C. About one-third of the registered participants were women.

A nearly complete changeover on the Conference Steering Committee also made organization difficult. "The original Steering Committee consisted of a few individuals who were excited about having the Conference in Atlanta, explained Lainey Richardson, assistant coordinator. By the time of the conference, only one of the original Committee members remained dedicated and involved, she said.

Local universities turned conference organizers away, forcing the rental of hotel facilities. "Traditionally, the SEC has been held on university campuses. Reduced facility costs, adequate housing, and available space requirements all contributed to this pattern," commented Allida Black, assistant coordinator of the conference. "The 1983 Committee found, however, that despite support from campus lesbian/gay organizations, no Atlanta-based university would house us at a reduced rate. The Vice-President of one university sent out word to department heads to pass us by — so much for school spirit in Atlanta! Thus, hotel facilities were leased."

"Holding the Conference at a hotel increased the cost of the event tremendously," agreed Coordinator Ron Wudarsky. "But, it was either hold the Conference at a hotel or not at all."

Finally, the forced evacuation of the Saturday night benefit and fund-raiser prevented a final plea for donations.

Various fund-raisers helped offset some of the debt, and some savvy bargaining with the hotel over the gas leak helped eliminate the rest.

Despite the difficulties, conference organizers felt that the effort had been worth it (although they doubted they'd do it again).

"We've all been at each other's throats at some point," Richardson remarked, "but we've managed to maintain our friendships and respect for each others' opinions. I have learned a lot from this Conference, some good, some bad, about Atlanta, our community, people's reactions to us, but most of all, that we need to really support each other."

Richardson and Wudarsky joined in making a statement after the conference:



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Dare To Question

We've had a lot of activity in our community lately. That activity has met with enormous resistance. I have a picture here from the Association Press, which appeared about two months ago, of a Ku Klux Klan demonstration. The headline reads "War on the American Library Association. The KKK joins fight over gay library books."

In this photograph of a KKK demonstration, there is only one sign visible. It says, "Stop Gay Pride."

Not stop "Gay Pride Week." Not stop the "Gay Pride March." *Stop Gay Pride.*"

The resistance is escalating. I don't have to tell you that. You live, most of you, in areas where just *being* gay or lesbian is a health hazard. And I want to acknowledge that.

But I also want to focus on what that resistance is truly about: the fact that *we dare to question* the heterosexual imperative. Heterosexuality in our society is set up in a fashion that says that men will be dominating of women and children, and be the deciding vote in matters of decision, even if they are not in the majority.

We go right to the heart of that issue. By saying we will *self-define*, and that this is our prerogative. We fly in the face of the very cornerstone of what enables heterosexuality to go on forever unquestioned. We do it as women, we do it as gays and lesbians, we do it as anyone of the other groups who don't fit the mold that America puts down in front of us: Heterosexual. White heterosexual. Christian, white, heterosexual.

That's a very, very key point.

We have to understand that what they are against is not this or that they they put out in front of us. It's not that we sleep together, it's not that we live together, it's not really that we teach. *It's that we dare to question.*

It's that we dare to challenge what has gone on unquestioned and unchallenged for so long. And any group that dares to question, that dares to challenge meets with closed eyes, closed ears, and rhetoric that says "Back in your place." "Back in your place."

I want us to understand that clearly.

Our challenge as gays and lesbians in terms of reaching out to each other and to the other groups who have with us a vested interest in revitalizing this system, in engaging this system in true change that will reflect a quality of life for people, is absolutely essential. I believe with all my heart and soul that we — we — can bring something that is noble of purpose to the struggle against oppression. And I feel that we're up to that challenge. Thank you.

— Virginia Apuzzo

"Although the Saturday performance was cut short, not permitting us to make a final plea for assistance," their statement read, "the strong feeling of comradery was felt as we gathered in the hotel parking lot to hear Rita Mae Brown and Armistead Maupin speak from atop the trunk of a car, reminiscent of our reactionary days. And, the positive expression of same-sex affection was made clear before, during, and after the Buffalo Chips' performance in the hotel's lounge. That was surely a night to remember.

"From comments received, lesbians and gay men who attended returned to their home with greater insight, broader skills, and encouragement for greater community involvement. The nearly 50 facilitators presented us with information and affirmation to help us realize the importance of our work. Plus, we all got to know each other a little bit better."

(Atlanta's workshops were typical in their wide variety. See article page 11.)



Concert on a Cartop

A broken pipe leaking chlorine gas forced the evacuation of a concert at the 8th SE Conference before the main attractions, Armistead Maupin and Rita Mae Brown, could speak. As the conference goers gathered in a parking lot outside the hotel, an automobile was put into service as a makeshift speaker's platform for the pair.

Maupin, speaking from atop the trunk of the roadster, said "It feels good to be back in the South. It was in Battery Park in Charleston where I *finally* lost my virginity."

He announced that he had created some new, and rather useful, categories. "For years now, I've been increasingly bothered by this 'straight' and 'gay' business. I'm perfectly happy to be called 'gay,' mind you, but I think 'straight' is a perfectly dreadful way to label someone you truly care about.

"In point of fact, the word itself has become terribly maligned: 'Straight' used to mean honest, direct and, on rare occasions, sober. Nowadays, it conjurs up hard images of James Watt and the Osmonds.

"So I've invented some new terms: 'G' and 'Non-G.' 'G' people are those who are either gay and comfortable around gay people or straight and comfortable around gay people. 'Non-G' people are either gay and not comfortable around gay people or straight and not comfortable around gay people."

Maupin's idea was greeted with applause. As an indication of how far the gay movement has come, he then offered some examples of "inroads that homosexuals have made into society that have not been generally acknowledged:

"The Brawny paper towel man, Margot Kidder (one of a new breed of dyke-like actress, that I am personally very fond of)," he said. "The way John Wayne walks. The way Barbara Stanwick walks. Ronald's Reagan's wife's dresses. Ronald Reagan's wife's

friends. Ronald Reagan's wife's son, Merv Griffin. Madame, but *not* Wayland Flowers. Jane Wagner and the straight women she lives with. The word 'hunk'."

Maupin waited for the laughter and applause to die down, and then became a little more serious.

"I am standing on top of this car tonight for reasons that may be obscure to the evangelical people who are meeting inside the building. But I hope you all know what we're here for..."

"I think it's high time that we let the rest of the world know that there are just as many gay men who resemble Richard Chamberlin as resemble Richard Simmons.

"And until we come out and let people know who we are, the world is *not* going to change for us. We cannot point our fingers at other people and say, 'they are doing this to us'. We are doing it to *ourselves*, and we have been for too long.

"I know that many of us think that the world is going to come to an end if someone in our life finds out that we're gay. This is not the case. There are fags on *Dynasty*, your mother watches *Dynasty*, your mother will know about it when the time comes.

"Speaking of which, I think the time has come for me to bring on someone who has become so dear and special to me in the last year that she has changed my life. We've done a number of gigs together, we're very fond of talking about our 'dog and pony show.' We've done everything from the Gay Olympics to a Wet Jockey Shorts Dance Contest.

"As a matter of fact, at the last Jockey Shorts Contest, a young woman came up to me, and said 'Are you Armistead Maupin?' and I said yes. I thought perhaps she wanted an autograph. She said 'How *well* do you know Rita Mae?

"Rita Mae has brought me much much closer to my lesbian sisters than I have ever been before. Because for a long time, I was the only person in San Francisco who had her phone number.

"She is my friend, my chum, and often my champion. . . Rita Mae Brown."

Deftly exchanging places with Maupin, Brown spoke to the Conference's need for funds. "I have two ideas. We could produce boy scout and girl scout shirts with badges for life: divorce, coming out, middle age. And if that doesn't do it for you, we *could* organize a gay carnival and each of us could be a ride."

"They say that all gay people are sex maniacs. Unfortunately, this is *not* true. I speak from deep personal experience. And, of course, the people who are always saying this are the Christian Right. Which is a contradiction in terms: they are not Christian and they are not right.

"And all this talk about 'gay' and 'straight.' I want to know, if we're 'gay,' are they 'glum?' Of course, we *could* call them 'dire straights.' And if somebody asks you if you're a dyke, you just say 'Why no, honey. I rather thought of myself as the Hoover Dam.'

"All my life I've really looked for the Right Woman, but in the meantime I've had a lot of fun with the wrong ones. I am probably the leading lesbian failure in America. I mean, it's so bad I'm going to put an ad in the *Atlanta Constitution*: 'Wanted: Lover. No Bad Habits. Must Be Willing To Learn.'

"It's quite an event to have your life spread across the newspapers. But I did learn one thing: the only thing worse than being talked about is *not* being talked about. So, have no pity upon me, it's all worked out fine.

"If I could leave you all with one thought, it would be this: You have a duty to act, a responsibility to act, and no right to expect approval. So, do it!"

Sample Workshops

There were three dozen workshops and seminars offered at the 8th Southeastern Conference in Atlanta. As with previous years, these covered a wide variety of topics. Examples: lesbian & gay literature, grassroots organizing, crisis counseling, lesbian herstory, gay parenting, homophobia, aging, police/community relations and much more.

• "Overcoming Trashing and Turf: Or How to Overcome Crises in Community Organizing" was the title of Virginia Apuzzo's workshop, which had a large attendance.

The session dealt with the problem of internal conflicts and power struggles that tend to vex every community. Approaches to address and rise above such conflicts were sought. Activists were cautioned about possessiveness leading to "imperialism" in the gay movement. There are issues existing that fall within the jurisdiction of several groups. The much publicized National Gay Task Force/Gay Rights National Lobby rivalry was an example of such conflict.

The consensus was that tasks should not be overdone at the expense of nurturing. Social bonds should be built to sustain people through periods of hard work. "It hurts to be trashed after you've given so much." Be sure you are doing what the organization wants, she warned activists. Be generous in your concern for the needs of individuals, she cautioned organizers. "Ferret out in a non-confrontational way. It will postpone ulcers. Politics should be happy. The other person would want to have input."

• Armistead Maupin and Allida Black talked about "Lesbian/Gay Literature: An Overview." Black concluded the workshop with an anecdote about her high school English teacher, who "moved to Meridian, Mississippi and founded a progressive school. They now have their first two black kids there, but she almost had to fire the board to get those kids in."

As a hopeful example, she told about their senior English class: "Out of the 27 students in that class, fourteen of them are men, five of them on the football team. And they all have to read *Rubyfruit Jungle* before they can graduate!"

There was also a Lesbian/Gay Poetry reading by local writers.

• Eight members of Gay Peer Volunteers, of Tallahassee, Florida, held a "how-to" workshop for starting and running a gay community resource organization to provide counseling, social events, a speaker's bureau, hot line, etc. They used individual descriptions and "role-playing" examples to depict how they help clients in search of information and those with sexual-identity concerns. They told of library resources, medical and legal referrals, rap groups and peer counseling situations getting clients to think through personal crises (using the "Switzer model").

• Doug, Gerry and Janice from Lynchburg, Va., offered "Grassroots Organizing: A Case Study from Falwell Country," based on their experiences forming the Blue Ridge Lambda Alliance and Positive Alternative Lifestyles.

They, too, offered a discussion of the development of gay community organizations, including initial problems, networking, recruitment of members, and methods to maintain vitality.

"The panel offered some valuable experience on how to hold a group with such diverse interests together," Ron Lambe noted, "with a light and flexible structure. They also suggested that if there is enough interest in a particular area such as politics, form another group. I suppose it would be just as viable to form a 'caucus' within a general support group, but the important point made about the success of their group was keeping it social and lightly structured. The involvement into doing a switchboard took a long, long time and a great deal of perseverance. I found the success of this grass-roots rural organization most reassuring particularly since they are surviving right in the core of Falwell country — his home town!"

• Other workshops on community organizing included "Police Community Relations," offering examples of techniques used in two major Southern cities, Atlanta and New Orleans; "Sexual Orientation vs Sexual Orientation and What It Has To Do With Homophobia, Coming Out, Oppression and Gay Pride," with Stewart Butler of New Orleans, LA.

• Caitlyn Ryan, an Atlanta therapist, participated in two workshops: "Coming Out in the South: Women's Experience — Issues and Concerns," and, with Washington, D.C. therapist Gary Raymond, "Being Out/Staying Out: The Professional's Dilemma in Creating Social Change."

• Franklin Abbott, another Atlanta therapist and a poet, also offered two workshops: "Making A Culture of our Own: A workshop for Gay Men," and "Keeping Well in a World That Wants You Sick," a workshop focusing on the emotional aspects and impact of sexually related diseases.

An additional health-related workshop was "Herpephobia," dealing with the problems addendant to herpes.

• Workshops aimed specifically at lesbians included "Feminist Therapy, Revisited" by Tina Stern, an Atlanta psychiatrist; "Lesbian Health Concerns," presented by staff members of the Feminist Women's Health Center; "Women's Music," presented by Beth York of Atlanta; "On Reviving Ancient Heresies," an examination of "matriarcal spirituality," facilitated by Maria Helena Dolan and Kandy Richmond of Atlanta; and a "Women's Caucus," offering a panel discussion on lesbian separatism — the history, the theory, and the reality — presented by members of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance.

• Political workshops included "Lesbian and Gay Rights before Congress," a presentation by Abby Rubenfeld of New York, a managing attorney with Lambda Legal Defense; "Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs: An Overview," by Tom Charlton, executive director of the National Association of Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs;

"Running for Office as an Openly Gay Candidate," based on the personal experiences of Ollie Lee Taylor of Tampa, FL and John Grannon or New Orleans, LA; and "Challenging the Sodomy Laws," an informational workshop lead by Katherine Wilde, a member of GOAL (Georgians Opposed to Archaic Laws).

Gannon ran for City Council in Tampa. He got a 9% share of the vote this spring. Taylor got a 1.5% share in February 1982 when he ran in Tallahassee.

Both Taylor and Gannon were in accord on the adequate financing and organization of a campaign needed to insure success. They agreed that sexuality was an issue only obliquely and was not a critical factor for their failure to do well in gaining voter support.

There were contrasts. Grannon opposed two black candidates. Although he was strong on civil rights issues, he was able to get only minimal minority support. Grannon garnered much of his financial support locally. Taylor, involved as a plaintiff in Bolden, et. al., vs Mobile, a redistricting case that reached the U.S. Supreme Court, had one black opponent in addition for four one white opponent. About 60% of Taylor's support came from outside the gay community.

Both men felt that they'd made a positive impact, despite the lack of support, and that they had built coalitions on progressive social issues.

• A number of workshops focused on relationships: "The Lesbian/Gay Couple as Family: Principles for Building Satisfying Relationships," "Gay Parenting," a look at raising children with non-stereotypical models for growth and change, led by John and Merril Harris from Dowlstown, TN, a lesbian/gay couple who have adopted four children; "Gay Coupling: Exploring Probable Parameters," "Issues of Aging: Old and Gray or Old and Gay?," and "Creating New Lives and Family Systems" by Gary Raymond.

Of course, not all the workshops offered were equally rewarding. Concerning Raymond's workshop, *The Front Page* was told: "He offered an extensive background of his personal experience of coming out and finding a lover who in turn developed a relationship with a woman, and how the three of them worked out a triad relationship," Ron Lambe said. "The concepts offered for the workshop were very exciting, but somehow Gary's presentation was quite dull and uninspiring. Perhaps that it was just the end of a busy day. I was hoping to hear some lively discussion on different ways we can form supportive relationships, but instead we were subjected to a monologue in great detail about one possibility. It was interesting to learn that such an arrangement can work. I was just hoping for more."

• Evangelical Outreach Ministries, a gay religious group based on Atlanta, Ga., held a workshop entitled "Gay Evangelicals: Your Voice in the Bible Belt."

• Black and White Men Together offered twin workshops, one on the organization itself and its role in the community, the other offering advice on making an outreach to minorities.



Atlanta's Melvin Ross and Memphis's Irwin Rothenberg told of activism and litigation to combat discrimination against blacks in gay oriented nightclubs and entertainment activities. Reports on moves to counter racism were made available to those in attendance. The facilitators were not shy in making their feelings known. When an Evangelical Outreach Ministry leader noted that the present circumstance was that there were no blacks in leadership positions of the program. Rothenberg demurred: "That's an unfortunate circumstance." In order to put into effect what they advocated, BWMT has by-laws requiring co-racial leadership in all its units.

Also facilitating these sessions were Grieg Leonard of Atlanta and Joe Calhoun of Memphis. •

The Revolution in a Day

I know all the reasons for not coming out, and if you try to come out individually, you *can* get picked off one by one.

But you and I can end gay oppression in five years time. I'll tell you exactly how to do it. I have no modesty.

During WWII, the Germans overran the Netherlands, and they said they were going to cart off everybody of Jewish extraction — of course, to be happily resettled in the East. The Dutch, however, were not so easily taken in. The Germans said that on the appointed day everybody who's Jewish has to wear a little yellow armband with a star of David on it. And, on the appointed day, *every citizen of the Netherlands was wearing the yellow armband*, including the King and the Queen. And that was the end of it.

The Germans didn't know who was who anymore. So, if we want to stop this silliness about who's straight and who's gay and who's in the closet... We take five years to organize, not a "Come Out Day," but an "Integrity Day," whereby we ask people to wear a lavender armband symbolizing that they feel that the government and groups have no right to tell anyone whom to love and when to love and that this is a matter of individual dignity and choice.

And with five years to organize this, I have a suspicion that an awful lot of people would wear those armbands.

That is my devout belief and hope.

— Rita Mae Brown, who spoke at the
8th Conference held in Atlanta, Georgia

Barbara Smith

by Pam Mitchell, Gay Community News

A racially mixed crowd of between 75 and a hundred people gathered in the International Lounge at Brandeis University on March 5 for a panel discussion on "Women of Color in the 80's: priorities, issues and directions." Black lesbian activist Barbara Smith delivered the keynote speech, in which she described the expanding Third World feminist movement and discussed some of the obstacles to that movement's continued growth, focusing in particular on racism and homophobia.

Smith began her talk by expressing regret that the audience hadn't been able to share in the "rousing discussion" of the evening's topic which had ensued when the panelists met over dinner earlier in the evening; she said that lively discussion was another indication that "we have a movement."

She reported that when the panelists compared notes about their lives in the Boston area, they all had a lot of stories to tell about the increasing poverty and racist violence in their own communities. White people must become conscious of the impact of racism on people's lives and must decide what actions to take, not out of charity but in the interests of "creating a decent world," Smith said.

As one example, she urged whites to consider the impact of gentrification on people of color when moving into "new" (to whites) neighborhoods. She said that at dinner she and other panel participants discussed how they had all been squeezed out of Boston's South End at some time.

However, she said she would like as much as possible to leave the topic of racism to white people to discuss, since dealing with racism and privilege "go with the territory" of being white. "I don't often talk about racism anymore," she said, "because it's not my job. But," she added, stressing that white people

must take anti-racist action, "these are serious times."

She said that, mainly, she wants to concentrate her energies on the "joyful topic" of the creation of women of color feminism.

Smith described how women of color feminism has grown from a few "voices crying in the wilderness" in the early '70's to a "real movement" by the '80's. There are now large numbers of Third World feminists "defining our own movement," she said, "though we don't get a lot of media coverage" from the white press.

The creation of autonomous Third World media is another sign of the vitality of the movement, she said. Leafing through the first issue of the new women of color newspaper *Between Our Selves*, based in Washington, D.C. she asked, "In 1970 or 1973, did I ever think I'd be holding a paper like this in my hands?"

Smith said the new movement includes many women of color who "may not call themselves feminists but when you're sitting in the room with them they come through." She said she has trouble identifying with the label of "feminist" herself when it "includes 'white' in parenthesis," but has no such reservations when feminism is infused with the particular world view and priorities of Black feminism, or Third World feminism.

When speaking of "Third World feminism," Smith stressed that it must be regarded as one noun, one entity - the words "Third World" are not just optional adjectives modifying (white) feminism. She said that Third World feminism includes a "multi-issue perspective." The concept of "manifold and simultaneous oppressions" - that someone who is a member of more than one oppressed group will experience those multiple oppressions at the same time and inseparably



Barbara Smith

and will have particular insight and perspective because of this - has been "the crux" of the theoretical contribution of Third World feminists.

Barbara Smith stressed that as an autonomous Third World feminist movement develops, "we determine the agenda," and women of color will participate in greater and greater numbers.

Though Third World feminists have gotten little credit or media attention for it, Smith said, it was actually women of color who

began discussing the concept of coalition later exemplified "very publicly" by the rainbow coalitions of Mel King and Jesse Jackson. While she praised King as a radical and activist who has acknowledged women of color and helped move their work forward, Smith characterized Jackson as "a politician...not a progressive," who has borrowed the coalition concept.

Smith went on to quote a passage from the Black feminist anthology *Home Girls* in

continued on page 17

Smith

continued from page 15

which Bernice Johnson Reagon describes coalition as neither a comfortable place nor a home, but as something participants join because if they don't link up, they "stand to be killed." As an example of this, Smith cited the significant number of people of color who have become involved in disarmament and anti-nuke work, since the issue affects everyone's survival, though "it's not people of color who are making the nuclear reactors" or raiding Native American lands and trading with South Africa for the fuel to run them; "basically, it's Protestant males" who have done so.

She added that people of color are "more likely to die today from police brutality" than from nuclear disaster.

Smith also touched on the problems that can arise when women from different communities of color attempt to overcome the barriers that have been erected between them by racism and isolation to work together. As an example during the question and answer period, she described difficulties that developed at Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, an institution Smith helped found. Although intended as a joint effort, many women of color have left amid a lot of tension so that the Press is now functionally a predominately Black enterprise.

"I will admit my ignorance" about other women of color, she said, and will work to overcome that ignorance in the interests of future coalition. She said she places highest priority on such work, and expressed optimism that differences can be overcome.

As one case in which homophobia could divide women of color, and one which represents a particular challenge to Black women, Smith discussed the dilemma posed by the U.N. End of the Women's Decade conference scheduled to occur in Kenya in July of 1985. The Kenyan government has announced it intends to arrest any lesbians, or even any political feminists, who come to Kenya to attend the conference. This is not an issue other women of color can be held accountable for, Smith said, but "how are Afro-American women going to act," she asked, "when they start trying to arrest us... within the family... in a country from which we came?" Black women have to be willing to say, "This is not going to wash any more."

Smith concluded her talk by encouraging Third World gay men and lesbians to continue working against homophobia both inside and outside of communities of color. She said that because of heavy pressure from Gil Gerald and the National Coalition of Black Gays, Jesse Jackson was pushed to talk about gay issues and even to say the words - not just gay, she noted, but lesbian as well - at the Democratic convention, and that kind of pressure and encouragement must continue.

operated "almost like a community center," says Maccubbin. He recalls the first Saturday that the store was open, "someone from Baltimore came in, gave a sigh and said, 'home at last!'"

The store offers a community bulletin board and serves as a ticket outlet for most concerts and events in the Gay and Lesbian community. While the local Gay switchboard only operates in the evenings, Maccubbin points out that the store is open during the day and tends to function "almost as a switchboard."

Moreover, he said, researchers in psychology and sociology have been able to make use of the store's specialized literature. And college English professors have been able to assign books available through the store. Families and friends also come to the shop in order to gain a better understanding of the Gay people in their lives.

For the first five years, the annual Gay Pride Festival was also sponsored by Lambda Rising. However, by the fifth year, when some 10,000 people attended, there was no longer enough space, so Maccubbin says he turned the celebration over to the P Street Festival community group.

Aside from being Washington's only Gay and Lesbian bookstore, Lambda Rising also set precedent in 1975 with the first Gay-oriented television commercial. Describing the struggle to get the commercials aired, Maccubbin says that two stations said that the

National Association of Broadcasters would have to clear them.

"At first," he said, "the standards board wanted the word 'adult' instead of 'Gay.' But I told them no, that's not what it is. That would make it sound like a porn shop." The commercials were finally approved.

By 1977, the 20th Street townhouse was stuffed to capacity and the bookstore was forced to relocate to a bigger space around the corner on S Street.

The *Washington Post* reported that during that year "publishers sent an unprecedented 60-plus books related to homosexuality out into the world." It also noted that "publishers agreed that the readership (for Gay books) is vast, unusually literate and engaged."

The following year, a Gay Caucus within the American Booksellers Association (ABA) was formed. The ABA adopted an anti-discrimination resolution. Moreover, literally hundreds of non-Gay bookstore owners set up Gay sections in their stores, Maccubbin says. He notes that these sections are especially important in areas where the Gay population is too small to support a specifically Gay bookstore.

The increased interest in Gay books has been particularly important for the Gay presses, which Maccubbin credits with getting Gay literature into print and keeping it there.

In another move to increase access to books of interest to the Gay and Lesbian community, Lambda Rising published a mail-order catalog about two years ago. While the catalog lists about 2,000 titles, readers can order some 10,000 titles, Maccubbin says.

One noteworthy store policy is that no fiction dealing with the subject of homosexuality is ever censored no matter

Deacon Maccubbin

by Bonita Becker, Washington Blade

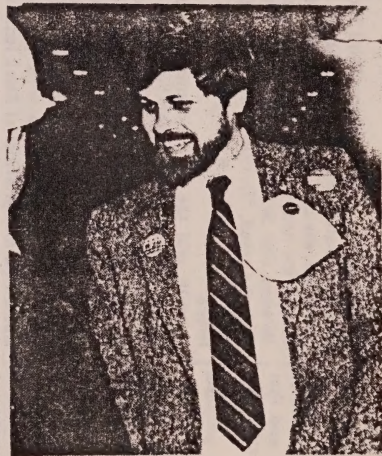
In December 1974, in Edinburgh, Scotland, the Greek letter "lambda" was designated by the Gay Rights Congress as the international symbol for Gay liberation. That same year, Lambda Rising Bookstore opened its doors to "celebrate the gay experience."

The store first opened in a 300-squarefoot townhouse on 20th Street, near Dupont Circle, store owner L. Page "Deacon" Maccubbin recalls. He remembers visiting the Oscar Wilde bookshop in New York two years prior to the opening of Lambda Rising "I said to myself, there should be a store like that in D.C."

So with \$3,000 of his own money, and \$1,000 from another Gay activist, he went into business.

Ten years (and a few months) later, that business, including a mail-order section and the new Baltimore store, is expected to gross about three-quarters of a million dollars in 1985, according to Maccubbin. The new D.C. store — on Connecticut Avenue — has 1700 square feet of office, stockroom, and mail-order area.

Maccubbin points out that the market for Gay and Lesbian books was there from the start. Yet neither libraries nor mainstream bookstores seemed aware of that fact, although in 1974 the Gay Activists Alliance estimated Washington's Gay population to be in the neighborhood of 40,000 to 50,000. The purpose of opening the store, says



Deacon Maccubbin

Maccubbin, was, in a sense, to "put ourselves out of business" by showing other stores that it paid to carry books by and about Gays.

But the need for a specialty shop remains in order to accommodate the vast increase in Gay literature, as well as to provide access to rare and out-of-print titles. The specialty store also provides an immediate marketplace for Gay authors who are starting out.

From the beginning, Lambda Rising served as more than a bookstore. Instead the store